

Marriage: God's Shadow of What Heaven Makes Real

God wants each earthly marriage to reflect to the world what it's like to be joined to Him. By His design, earthly marriage shadows the heavenly reality- it gives us glimpses of salvation. A good marriage is God's shadow of what heaven makes real. If lived out well, marriage is one of the finest forms of evangelism.

*A good marriage is one of the finest forms of evangelism -
it points to what's real about salvation.*

What do marriage and salvation have in common? A lot. Permanent commitment to one who differs from ourselves. Legal, public vows to be faithful. Oneness. Rejoicing. Even a change in where we live. The similarities are extensive and purposeful. Together they form God's shadow of salvation. Take a look:

Permanent Commitment

Salvation is permanent. It can't be undone. A literal translation of Hebrews 13:5 is stunningly clear on this point. God promises He will *never, never* to let us sever our relationship with Him and promises that He will *never, never, never* leave us. He couldn't have said it more forcefully; this is the strongest language in the whole New Testament. Salvation is permanent.

God wants our marriages to illustrate to the world the permanence of His commitment to us. We, by our faithfulness to each other, signal that God is faithful to us. Permanent earthly oneness broadcasts the truth that salvation's oneness can't be broken. Marital commitment is part of God's shadow of salvation.

A Vow to Be Faithful

Legal vows, marriage vows, have another function – they define a relationship. Forsaking all others makes clear that there's no middle ground. Faithfulness means exclusive commitment. This is true for both weddings and salvation. We either are married or we aren't. We either are Christians or we aren't. Marital faithfulness is a part of God's shadow of salvation.

Making our commitment public helps us keep our vows, both to our spouse and to God. Witnesses to our wedding promises solemnize them and make them less easy to squirm out of. (It's trickier to pretend we weren't really serious when others heard us say we are.) It's also easier to keep our promises when others know we made them and will help us hold to our vows. God asks us to have witnesses to our promise to Him: we're to confess to others that we've asked Jesus to be our Lord ((Romans 10:9). Marriage vows are part of God's shadow of salvation.

Oneness

Both marriage and salvation bring oneness. What happens to the husband and wife at the wedding? Both the Old and New Testaments say they become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8, 1 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 5:31). And at salvation? When we join ourselves to Jesus we become "one spirit" with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17). God deliberately uses the same word for each relationship: *oneness*. It's a mystery. And it's real. Marital oneness is part of God's shadow of salvation.

Joy

Earthly grooms rejoice as their bride draws near. He sees his bride's delight, she sees his, and their wedding guests watch their joy. Heavenly weddings intensify the joy: angels thrill as they watch each salvation (Luke 15:10), we rejoice (Revelation 19:7), and God thrills as well (Isaiah 62:5).

Luke 15:10 In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Revelation 19:7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.

Isaiah 62:5 ...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you.

While God's love for us is constant, earthly couples (perhaps over many years) must learn the steady love that brings each other joy. As we practice imitating God, our marriages more and more accurately mirror joy shared with God. Learning joy is key, for joy is part of God's shadow of salvation.

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so your God will rejoice over you.*

A New Address

One last thing. Earthly marriage usually brings a new address. Heavenly marriage *always* brings a new address. God promises. Part of His promise takes place at salvation: we instantly move from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of the beloved Son (Colossians 1:13).

But there's more. King Solomon brought his bride into his chambers (Song of Songs 1:4). Jesus will do the same. As I write these words, Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven (John 14:2-3). When we arrive, He will bring us into His chambers. His chambers! It's most personal. Both marriages and salvation anticipate that intimate night which introduces the days and nights to follow. Sharing chambers is also part of God's shadow of salvation.

A FEW QUESTIONS

- Marriage is evangelistic. It's intended to give glimpses of the relationship God wants us to have with Him. Is this true of the marriages you observe? Is it true of your marriage?
- What would have to change for your marriage to portray a relationship with God more accurately? Think about it. Talk about it with your spouse and find out what they think.
- Ephesians 5 calls Jesus a bridegroom and the church (as a whole) His bride. Still, we must accept His proposal individually – He asks each of us to be His bride. Have you said yes?

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